

REMARKS

Claim 15 has been amended. Claims 15, 16 and 22-33 are currently pending. Reexamination and allowance of the pending claims is respectfully requested.

First, Applicant has amended independent claim 15 to make the language consistent. Thus, allowance of claims 15 and 16 is respectfully requested.

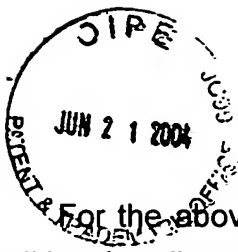
Second, claims 22-33 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) or 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over USP 5,827,321 to Roubin et al. ("Roubin"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Independent claim 22 recites, among other limitations, that the "connecting member [is] straight when the annular elements are in the expanded state". In contrast, the connecting member 48b is not straight when the annular elements are in the expanded state. Even though the connecting member 48b has straight segments 84, 86, they are angled with respect to each other.

Even though Applicant believes that claim 22 (as it currently exists) clearly distinguishes over the connecting member 48b in Roubin, Applicant is willing to amend claim 22 in the following manner if the Examiner believes that this would place the application in condition for allowance:


"... the entire connecting member being straight when the annular elements are in the expanded state ..."

In light of the above, claim 22 is submitted to be allowable over Roubin. Claims 23-33 depend from claim 22 and are submitted to be allowable for the same reasons.



For the above reasons, it is respectfully submitted that all pending claims are in condition for allowance. The Examiner is encouraged to telephone the undersigned if there are informalities that can be resolved in a phone conversation, or if the Examiner has any ideas or suggestions for further advancing the prosecution of this case.

Respectfully Submitted,


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Dated: June 16, 2004

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